

Reading *Ulysses* at a Gallop

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As a curious Ulyssean reader I have often wondered why there are so many horses in *Ulysses*. This question seems to have quite a simple answer: there are so many horses because one can find in *Ulysses* a great deal of almost everything. However, taking the novel as a whole, another explanation can be possible. The purpose of this paper is to try to find out why Joyce gave such an important part to horses in his *Ulysses*.

As a matter of fact, *Ulysses* is full of allusions, sayings, set phrases, puns, scientific references, characters running into each other and, of course, animals, which play their role in the complex interrelated world of *Ulysses*. As a preface, let us remember Joyce's well-known assertion that *Ulysses* is a sort of encyclopaedia, as we can read in the notes for the schema that he sent Carlo Linati on September 21st, 1920.

Apart from that, rhetorics have always provided writers with the possibility of introducing metaphors, similes, synecdoches, metonymies, etc. Since animals have constantly been close to mankind, the occurrence of animal imagery is not strange in the History of Literature as well as in everyday oral speech.

Even though this is a platitude, it can well serve as an introduction to our subject of animal imagery in general and horse references in particular. Although Joyce was not obviously the first writer to use them, he was definitely one of the writers that most frequently did it.¹ According to Gose, although he is not very explicit (VII-VIII), this taste for animal imagery may stem from two authors that Joyce knew for sure, i.e. Giordano Bruno and Sigmund Freud.²

Besides this general statement, and taking into account that Joyce is a twentieth century writer and thus many biographical data are extant, it is not difficult to realize that he overtly laid bare his preference to use animals in order to define and describe human beings, as many other writers have done before. This way, we know that he once said: "A husband usually is an ox with horns, and his wife without a brain. Together they make a four-legged animal."³ Similarly, he answered a question in the following way: "What is a pachyderm? That gentleman you see there with a nose like a trumpet and a great belly, that is a pachyderm."⁴ Let us give another instance taken from a conversation in Zurich that his friend Hummel remembers:

"Human beings sometimes appear to me to take the shape of an animal. Budgen for example is a beaver." "What am I?," asked Hummel. "I've always thought of you as a calf," Joyce answered without mercy. "Thank you very much. And do you have an animal in mind of yourself?" "Yes," Joyce replied, "a deer." (*JIII* 438)

After recalling these data, this idea of describing people in terms of animal imagery seems clear in our author's mind. This can be proved true

when one reads *Ulysses*, since from the first chapter onwards there are quite a deal of them, both real and metaphorical.⁵ Perhaps one might tend to think that some characters and the narrator in *Ulysses* undergo a transformation which should be well-known to Joyceans: "Metempsychosis, he said, is what the ancient Greeks called it. They used to believe you could be changed into an animal or a tree, for instance" (4.375-76).⁶

This paper does not aim to cover such a large matter, but only the presence of horses and mares in *Ulysses*, a subject that, to my knowledge, has already been treated in two articles.⁷ Apart from realistic references—horses were the basic means of transport at the beginning of the 20th century—it is also important to bear in mind that it is a commonplace to connect Dubliners to horses, and Joyce refers to them in the fourth riddle in *Finnegans Wake* as "the most phillohippuc theobibbius paupulation in the world" (140.12). Similarly, the chauvinistic Citizen mentions horses as one of the sources of Irish pride: "our farfamed horses even today, the Irish hobbies" (12.1252-53).

The horse also appears in the second schema, whose publication Joyce himself authorized in Stuart Gilbert's widely known book.⁸ The horse is presented as the symbol for the second chapter, although symbols are not mentioned at all in the Linati schema. In spite of this authorial warning, equine allusions are not as frequent as in other chapters (e.g. chapters 8 or 14). Those recurrences are twofold; on the one hand, some allude to the horse pictures recalling History—the art of that chapter in the schema, which old Deasy has in his office (2.286, 2.300-304, 2.331-37).⁹ On the other hand there is an actual fact, the time when Stephen went to the races to bet with Cranly, a situation that could be linked to money—the leitmotif in the conversation. Although we find these horses in chapter 2, I think that one can consider that the horse could have stood for the symbol of another chapter too, as the other many occurrences suggest.

After examining another chapter, "Wandering Rocks," we feel that horses can be a linking device not simply for the chapter but also for the whole novel. Chapter 10 is to some scholars the one that best summarizes the idea that, at least for many readers, rules the novel—wholeness. All Joyceans know that this chapter introduces several apparently unconnected or isolated scenes and ends in a final section that shows the viceregal cavalcade throughout Dublin coming across all the characters that have appeared in the other sections. Therefore, the viceregal's horse-drawn carriage or the sound of the hoofs serves as a link for the whole chapter, making horses important again.

Horses appear in one way or another—sometimes in the characters' minds, in all chapters with the sole exception of chapter 4. As it happened when dealing with chapter 10, we can easily conclude that horses are one of the elements that join the chapters in *Ulysses*, creating an interdependence and cohesion that strikes most readers of traditional plots.

Characters in *Ulysses* meet and chat a lot. And one of the topics that they discuss more often is horse-races. Horse-racing is, from a naturalistic point of view, a turning point for the plot. Dubliners in 1904 were indeed fond of betting. Thus, in chapter 5 Bantam Lyons asks for a newspaper to see the horses that are scheduled at Ascot on June 24 (5.520).¹⁰ Since Bloom wants to get rid of the newspaper, he tells him to throw it away. As "Throwaway" is the name of a horse, Lenehan interprets it as a tip. From then on, references to the Ascot Gold Cup occur in almost every chapter of the novel. All Joyceans know well this episode and no further account of it is necessary.¹¹ The fact is that the result of a race has made Bloom important among the Dubliners that have never treated him as one of them.

Putting realistic or factual equine references aside, horse images do not only join chapters and the plot, but also bring characters together. If one thinks of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, it is curious to notice how both of them mention having thought of betting in horse races (Stephen attended once with Cranly, as mentioned above, 2.307-10; Bloom imagines devising a system to win, 17.1674-78). In addition to this, they see the people they live with in *Ulysses* as horses: Stephen mentions Mulligan's equine face in "Telemachus" (1.15) and recalls it in "Proteus" (3.111).¹² Similarly, he follows a proverb to describe Haines as "Horn of a bull, hoof of a horse, smile of a Saxon" (1.732).¹³ As far as Bloom is concerned, he and his wife have attended the trotting matches and both remember that event (18.1068-69, 5.297-9). In "Oxen of the Sun" Bloom recalls Molly and his daughter Milly as "a mare leading her fillyfoal" (14.1083). As it is shown, this is one of the many features that make Bloom and Stephen similar, approaching "Bloom Stoom" and "Stephen Blephen" in "Ithaca" (17.569).

However, associations among characters in equine terms have not reached an end. According to Piwinski's article, it is not a mere coincidence that the pub in which Bloom and Boylan have met before is called "Bleeding Horse," since it can be linked to the similar image Molly has of herself when menstruating in "Penelope." As this article plausibly points out, Blazes Boylan is often associated with horses.¹⁴ To begin with, as Bloom and Molly know, he is the son of a horse dealer (12.998-99, 18.403). His movements towards the Ormond Hotel and 7 Eccles Street are present in "Lestrygonians" and "Sirens," marked by the sound of his jaunting car, will be echoed in the sound of Molly's bed. And this sound will remind Bloom of the fact that he is a cuckold. Moreover, after reviewing the list of Molly's alleged lovers, we find something else: three of them bear some relationship with horses "Boylan . . . Lenehan . . . and a fairer at the Royal Dublin Horse Show" (17.1232-42). If this is not enough, Lenehan comments in the pub that Boylan has bet for "Sceptre" in the Ascot Gold Cup (12.1222-23). This fact does not seem to be random either, since, as a phallic symbol, Molly will remember the size of his penis later (18.142-43).¹⁵ Given that we are informed that the winning horse was Throwaway, which is related to Bloom not only for the tip he gives to Lenehan but also because "[h]e is a bloody dark horse himself" (12.1337), this outcome of the race provided Joyce with a richly allusive image that prefigures the day after Bloomsday, since it can be inferred from that result that while beating Sceptre, Bloom is recovering Molly's love and they will have sexual intercourse again.

The world of *Ulysses* is a world of coincidences. The amount of coincidences that take place in this world has been pointed out many times. If one bears in mind that "dark" is an adjective that frequently defines Bloom and Molly, in contrast with Milly's suspicious fair hair,¹⁶ it is not strange to find Throwaway labelled as "a dark horse" — punning with the meaning of "unexpected winner."

To continue with sexual allusions, there are several times in which women are described as if they were horses: "Strong as a brood mare some of those horsey women" (10.345), "Argive Helen, the wooden mare of Troy" (9.622). In the same way, in "Circe," both Bella and Bloom turn into female horses. Sexual intercourse is equated to horse riding, a commonplace in the history of literature, and Molly herself considers Boylan "like a stallion driving it up into you" (18.152).¹⁷ Bloom does not forget that his wife is a mare — Lenehan refers to her saying "[s]he's a gamey mare and no mistake" (1.566-67) — since some of the characters that he regards as lovers, as pointed out above, are related to horses.

We cannot finish this paper without a reference to Stephen's aesthetic theories that appear mainly in *Portrait*. We find an equine allusion to them

in “Scylla and Charibdis”: “Horseness is the whatness of allhorse” (9.84). In my opinion, the use of horses to refer to what is defined in *Portrait* as: “the radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the whatness of a thing” is not a coincidence either. Let us remember that Aquinas and his followers distinguished between the essence of a thing (*quidditas*, whatness) and its existence, a distinction that the artist must bear in mind to reach beauty in the work of art. We should not forget that: “the epiphany was the sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing, the moment in which the soul of the commonest object . . . seems to us radiant” (*SH* 211-12). If not the commonest object, the horse is probably the commonest animal, and it shows us its essence throughout *Ulysses* in different ways, bringing situations, plot and characters all together.

Notes

1. I am currently writing a longer study in which I examine all the animal references in Joyce’s works, trying to organise a kind of bestiary.
2. Elliott B. Gose, Jr., *The Transformation Process in Joyce’s Ulysses* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1980).
3. George Borach, ed., *Recollections of Joyce: Portraits of the Artist in Exile* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1979) 26.
4. Borach 27.
5. To Bernard Benstock, animal imagery starts in the first chapter because it “gives the ‘Telemachus’ chapter its organic unity and paves the way for the augmentation of one of the major motifs of *Ulysses*” (Bernard Benstock, “Telemachus,” *James Joyce’s Ulysses: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman [Berkeley: U of California Press, 1974] 10).
6. Humans are also animals, as we are taught at school and this platitude, like many others, appears in *Ulysses* too:
Did Stephen participate in his dejection?
He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding sylogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon de incertitude of the void. (17.1001-15)
7. Although many critics have written something on Joyce and horses, I have only found two articles devoted exclusively to this topic. I am referring to David J. Piwinski in “The Image of the Bleeding Horse in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (*Papers on Language and Literature* 26.2 [1990]: 285-88), who makes a close reading on horse allusions and their relationship to the adultery affair between Boylan and Molly, and V. Cheng in “White Horse, Dark Horse: Joyce’s Allhorse of Another Color” (*Joyce Studies Annual* 2 [Austin: U of Texas P, 1991] 101-28), who includes *Finnegans Wake* in his study and focuses mainly on horses as symbol of power.
8. Stuart Gilbert, *Ulysses: A Study* (1930; New York: Vintage, 1952) 30.
9. Peake asserts that the horse “is a puzzling symbol,” as the horses refer to the races in the past. In the case of Stephen, it can be a symbol of the world as a competition and the server of an English master (Charles Peake, *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1977] 159). Gilbert points out that Deasy follows the figure of Nestor because both had ancestors who rode (111).
10. Almost every time Bantam Lyons speaks, he refers to horse-racing. Yet, in his first performance in Joyce’s works, in “Two Gallants,” we only learn that “his name was vaguely associated with racing tissues” (*D* 50).
11. The account of the race is pretty close to the real one, as Kain and Loveridge have demonstrated (see Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager: A Study of James Joyce’s Ulysses* [New York: Viking, 1966] 56-60, and Mark Loveridge, “Joycean Narrators Report the Ascot Gold Cup in *The Times*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 28.3 [1991]: 679-82). The latter critic, after having examined the reports from *The Times* and *Evening Telegraph* concludes that it is very difficult to know for sure how the Golden Cup was run (681).
12. Although *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* is not as rich in animal imagery as *Ulysses*, we can read that McCann, a gipsy student, is also described as

having an equine face: "He turned his olive face, equine in expression, towards Stephen, inviting him to speak again" (P 196).

13. Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 27.

14. Piwinski 285-86.

15. Enrique Montero Castelo quotes two references of the word *sceptrum* used in this sense (=penis) in Classical Latin (*El latín erótico: aspectos léxicos y literarios* [Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1991] 75-76).

16. To me, this information in 17.867-60 is one of the cruxes that remain unsolved in the fictional story of the Blooms. Does it mean that Milly is actually the daughter of a fair-haired man?

17. Ovid lists it as one of the *figurae veneris*, called "the Horse of Hector" (*Ars Amatoria* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994] III.777-78). Enrique Montero quotes an occurrence in Martial (13-14).